

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

Claims 1 – 3 (Canceled)

4. (Currently Amended) A knee protecting airbag device arranged below a steering column of a vehicle, the device comprising:

an airbag;

a case attached to the vehicle for housing the ~~folded~~ airbag, wherein the case has a recessed section at a front side thereof, the case being arranged directly below the steering column, the case further being arranged apart from the steering column before the airbag is inflated, the recessed section being arranged substantially at a lateral center of the case to indent a portion of the case near an upper and front-side corner of the case;

an inflator attached to the case for inflating the airbag; [[and]]

an airbag cover assembled with the case and including a door portion covering the opening of the case; and

an interior decoration member for the vehicle provided separate from the airbag cover, wherein the case is arranged at a front side of the vehicle with respect to the interior decoration member, wherein the airbag cover and the interior decoration member are flush and form a continuous surface in a direction facing a rear side surface of the vehicle while the airbag is in an unoperated state.

5. (Currently Amended) The ~~knee-protecting~~ knee protecting airbag device according to claim 4, wherein:

the case opens toward the rear of the vehicle, ~~the case~~ and houses the inflator, ~~the airbag device further comprises:- inflator;~~

~~an airbag cover assembled with the case, wherein:~~

the airbag cover includes a door portion covering the opening of the case;

the door portion is adapted to open upon deployment of the airbag; and

the door portion includes at least an upper door that opens upwardly; wherein the interior decoration member is arranged around the airbag cover, and the airbag, upon inflow of inflation gas from the inflator, pushes open the door portion and expands and inflates upward while protruding toward the rear of the vehicle, and the dimensions of the upper door are such that a gap formed between the interior decoration member and the airbag cover is covered when the airbag is deployed.

6. (Previously presented) A knee protection airbag device arranged in front of the knees of a seated vehicle occupant, the airbag device comprising:

a case for housing an airbag and an inflator, the case being secured to the vehicle body and being opened rearward;

an inflator for supplying the airbag with inflation gas;

an airbag folded and housed in the case, the airbag, when fed with inflation gas by the inflator, protruding rearward from the opening of the case and expanding upward; and

an airbag cover assembled with the case for covering the opening of the case, the airbag cover being surrounded by an interior decoration member of the vehicle in a lower region of the interior decoration member, the airbag cover being inclined such that the upper end thereof is located rearward than the lower end thereof as viewed from the side, and in an unoperated state, the airbag cover and the interior decoration member being flush at the vehicle's rear side surface, the airbag cover comprising an upward-opening door through which the airbag protrudes from, the door being opened when pushed by the inflating airbag, wherein:

when the airbag device is actuated, the airbag device moves forward of the vehicle as a whole such that the upper end of the airbag cover and the interior decoration member are separated from each other in the front-rear direction in such a manner as to provide a gap therebetween; and

the upward-opening door of the airbag cover opens and abuts against the interior decoration member and covers the gap, whereby the airbag is prevented from entering into the gap.

7. (Previously presented) The knee protection airbag device according to claim 6, wherein the airbag cover further comprises a downward-opening door openable downward upon airbag deployment, below the upward-opening door.

8. (Currently Amended) The knee protection airbag device according to claim ~~[[1]]~~ 6, wherein the airbag cover comprises a general portion located around the door for supporting the interior decoration member from the vehicle's front side.

9. (New) The knee protecting airbag device according to claim 4, further comprising a steering column cover for covering the steering column, the steering column cover being provided separately from the interior decoration member.